

Statement

26.9.2008

Statement on Bologna beyond 2010

The National Union of University Students in Finland (SYL) issues respectfully to the Ministry of Education the following statement regarding the future of the Bologna Process beyond 2010.

SYL supports the objectives of the Bologna Process on European and national level as well as on institutional level.

SYL is pleased to note that it is widely recognized that while a lot of work has been carried out, there is a still lot to be done in order to reach and implement the agreed objectives of the Bologna Process.

The legal structures are in place in many countries, but not in all, and this still requires attention. If Bologna is to be successful, all participating countries need to be on the same level.

However, SYL recognizes as more labour-some the grass root implementation of reforms. SYL stresses that true implementation cannot happen at the European level or even at national level. SYL believes that the only way to realize the objectives of Bologna is to respect the institutional autonomy and academic freedom of universities. Bologna objectives can be reached only on the level of institution, department, programme and individual. Objectives such as student centred learning, design of curricula based on learning outcomes, correct implementation of ECTS, culture of quality, recognition of prior learning, mobility, social dimension and lifelong learning are not only about structures, but also about attitudes and mindset. Reforms can be carried out only if the academic community agrees with them and view them as necessary.

National and European levels are there to provide support and monitor the process, but the focus of attention must be on the institutional level. HEIs need support in implementation, in form of information, expertise and financial resources. SYL believes that this support is not sufficiently provided by the current working structures of the Bologna Process.

The future of Bologna

SYL notes with great concern and objection the gradual integration of the Bologna Process and the Lisbon strategy – an attempt to transform a process of 46 countries into a tool for competitiveness of the European Union. Globalization, viewed from the perspective of competitiveness, marketization and commodification of higher education, governance and funding of HEIs, important as such, are issues for other fora. They are not, and should not be, the *raison d'être* of the Bologna Process.

The Bologna Process has by definition rested upon a co-operation between the various stakeholders (Governments, academic community, society at large) and this should also be the case in future. However, SYL feels that if the above mentioned themes are introduced to Bologna Process, the co-operation within and legitimacy and support of the Bologna Process will be compromised.

SYL understands that implementation and follow-up is not as exciting as creating new objectives, but underlines that the continuous commitment of the ministers for HE to the current objectives is of utmost importance. If commitment is lacking on higher level, it is impossible to expect it on institutional level.

Attempts to make institutional diversity more transparent are a logical continuation on degree structure comparability and the underlying goal of transparency and comparability of EHEA. SYL recognizes the fact that there is a multitude of HEIs with different profiles in Europe, and sees the need for more transparency. However, SYL stresses that this must be done in a way which underlines the equality of different profiles and institutional missions. SYL emphasizes that diversity is the strength of Europe. If increased transparency leads to preferential categorization, the risk of diminishing diversity, due to e.g. academic drift, is real.

Bologna has been successful because it has been an open process with sense of ownership and involvement of the academic community and other stakeholders. It has been a process with goals of comparability and compatibility, of raising the quality of HE-systems, of enhancing European integration, of understanding and celebrating diversity, of promoting mobility and intercultural dialogue, of cooperation within Europe and with other regions of the world and goals of social equality - goals that can be, and are, shared and supported by SYL.

The existing goals are still to be reached and SYL proposes that rather than introducing new objectives, such as reform of HEIs' governance or funding, the ministers state more concrete targets, such as 20 percent of students having a mobility period in their studies, for the implementation of the original goals. In addition to quantitative targets, also qualitative targets should be set.



SYL welcomes the continuation of the Bologna process beyond 2010 as it has a great potential of profound reform and improvement. SYL sees the years after 2010 as a time that the process and its goals become a reality and the process actually starts.

In Helsinki, 26th of September, 2008

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